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Biggest challenge is aiding homeless, says authority chairman

By SUSAN DANSEYAR

Looking back over the year since Miami City Commissioner Manolo Reyes began serving as board chairman for the Downtown Development Authority, he is proud of work that the agency has accomplished and said board members and staff are now preparing for challenges ahead to continue supporting the needs of businesses, visitors and the homeless.

While Mr. Reyes said he has always been interested in the development of downtown, it became clear to him when he was elected chair of the DDA board that the way to bring people back to the area was to provide amenities and a reason to come downtown.

The biggest challenge, Mr. Reyes said, has been helping the homeless while improving street-level conditions. To that end, he sponsored legislation in June 2020 to regulate public feedings. Groups distributing meals to this population must now do so in a designated spot. In return, the city will equip each feeding site with trash receptacles and hand-washing stations. The DDA has also partnered with the city and



Photo by Cristina Sullivan

The way to bring people downtown is to offer amenities and reasons to come there, said Manolo Reyes.

Camillus House to expand the PitStop public restroom program.

The DDA has also allocated \$180,000 that will go toward supporting Lotus House's new pilot program for four new shelter beds and outreach to the homeless within Miami's DDA district and 75 shelter beds at Camillus House.

Mr. Reyes said he remembers when "downtown was the place to be." Over the years, though, he noticed during nighttime drives through the area that it had become dark and gloomy.

One of Mr. Reyes' first initiatives with the DDA was to help start an illumination program. All

canopies must now be illuminated to help bring a sense of security. He said the DDA is currently making an analysis of how many more street lamps should be installed.

It was difficult during the pandemic to encourage businesses and visitors to come downtown but, Mr. Reyes said, through

collaboration with Miami-Dade agencies, including the Beacon Council, seven businesses will be moving to the area.

The DDA must persist in initiatives to make downtown Miami attractive to businesses and residents, Mr. Reyes said. One way to do that, he said, is by increasing security. Currently, the authority is talking to police about improving the quality of policing and looking into subsidizing private security to help officers.

Maintaining the area's quality of life is also extremely important. The DDA is opposed to a proposal by the US Army Corps of Engineers that is calling for construction of a 15-foot-high floodwall in the middle of Biscayne Bay, just off the shore along downtown Miami. "I consider [the concrete wall] a monstrosity to the area," Mr. Reyes said.

The DDA supports a solution that includes using man-made barrier islands as breakwaters just offshore, artificial reefs that will reduce storm-driven wave energy that can lead to coastal flooding and living shorelines along the waterfront that provide an added layer of protection for the seawall and waterfront infrastructure.